

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-20 PC-01 SS-15 SP-02 CIAE-00
INR-10 NSAE-00 L-03 ICA-11 AGRE-00 EB-08 COME-00
TRSE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03 NSC-05 /092 W
-----117073 081843Z /43
R 080830Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8451

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KABUL 4651

DEPT PASS AID AND PEACE CORPS; AID FOR NE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAID, AF, US
SUBJECT: U.S. ASSISTANCE TO AFGHANISTAN; MEETING WITH THE
MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, DRA. SALEH MOHAMMAD ZERAY

1. SUMMARY: ON JUNE 5, I MADE MY INITIAL CALL ON THE
NEW MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE ZERAY. WE DISCUSSED THE
MAJOR PROBLEMS CONFRONTING HIS MINISTRY, PARTICULARLY
THE NEED FOR LAND REFORM. WHILE STATING HIS DESIRE
FOR ALL THE AID HE COULD GET "WITHOUT STRINGS", HE
WAS COMPLETELY UNFAMILIAR WITH OUR AID ACTIVITIES, AND
EXPLICITLY OPPOSED TO NORMAL PEACE CORPS PROGRAMS. END SUMMARY.

2. I CALLED ON THE NEW MINISTER AT HIS OFFICE ON
JUNE 5, ACCOMPANIED BY THE USAID AND PEACE CORPS
DIRECTORS. THE MINISTER IS A SMALL MAN OF SLIGHT BUILD,
SOMEWHAT SHY AND SOFT-SPOKEN, BUT VERY ALERT AND ATTEN-
TIVE. WHILE EXCHANGING PLEASANTRIES, I ASKED THE
MINISTER HOW HE HAD SPENT HIS TIME BEFORE BECOMING
MINISTER. HE SMILED AND SAID, "MUCH OF IT IN JAIL".
HE SAID THAT HE CAME FROM KANDAHAR AND THAT HIS FIRST
REAL JOB WAS WITH THE AMERICAN CONSTRUCTION FIRM,
MORRISON-KNUDSON. HE WORKED ON AND OFF WITH MK FOR
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EIGHT YEARS, STARTING AS A THIRD CLERK AND WORKING HIS
WAY UP TO FIRST CLERK AND INTERPRETER. AFTER THAT HE
WORKED FOR ARIANA AFGHAN AIRLINES FOR A WHILE BEFORE
GOING TO MEDICAL SCHOOL AT KABUL UNIVERSITY. LATER HE
RAN FOR PARLIAMENT AND ENDED UP IN JAIL SOME NINE YEARS
AGO IN 1348, "OUR DATE", THEN WITH A TWINKLE SAID
THAT AFGHANISTAN WAS STILL LIVING IN THAT ERA BY "YOUR

DATE".

3. RECALLING THAT AFGHANISTAN WAS AN AGRICULTURAL NATION, AND THAT THE RECENT WORLD BANK REPORT HAD ARGUED FOR AN AGRICULTURAL LED GROWTH STRATEGY, I ASKED THE MINISTER WHAT HIS PLANS WERE FOR AGRICULTURE. HE RESPONDED BY NOTING THAT WHILE MOST OF THE POPULATION WERE INDEED INVOLVED IN AGRICULTURE, THAT AFGHANISTAN WAS AN "AGRICULTURAL NATION" ONLY BECAUSE IT HAD NO INDUSTRY. HE ALSO NOTED THAT DESPITE AFGHANISTAN'S LARGE LAND AREA, ONLY SOME 3 MILLION HECTARES WERE SUITABLE FOR FARMING, BUT HE DID AGREE THAT AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION MUST INCREASE.

4. THE MAJOR IMPEDIMENTS TO INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY, HE SAID, WERE LACK OF ADEQUATE INCENTIVES AMONG SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED FARMERS, AND THE EXTENSIVE, IDLE AREAS HELD BY LARGE LANDOWNERS. HE EXPLAINED THAT RETURNS TO AGRICULTURE INPUTS WERE DIVIDED IN APPROXIMATELY FIVE EQUAL PARTS: LAND, WATER, EQUIPMENT, SEED AND LABOR. IF A FARMER PROVIDES ONLY THE LABOR THERE WAS LITTLE INCENTIVE FOR HIM TO INCREASE PRODUCTION.

5. LAND REFORM, HE SAID, WAS THE KEY TO HIGHER PRODUCTIVITY. HE STATED THAT DIFFERENT COUNTRIES APPROACHED LAND REFORM DIFFERENTLY, DEPENDING ON THEIR INDIVIDUAL

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CIRCUMSTANCES. IN AFGHANISTAN, HE SAID, 85 PERCENT OF THE RURAL POPULATION OWNED SOME LAND WITH THE REMAINDER EITHER LANDLESS LABORERS OR NOMADS. HE SAID THAT NATIONALIZATION OF LAND, IN GENERAL, WAS NOT THE ANSWER FOR AFGHANISTAN, ALTHOUGH SOME REDISTRIBUTION OF IDLE LAND WAS NECESSARY.

6. THE AID DIRECTOR BRIEFLY DESCRIBED THE STATUS AND OUTSTANDING ISSUES OF ONGOING AND PLANNED AID PROJECTS. THE MINISTER WAS ATTENTIVE THROUGHOUT BUT MADE NO SPECIFIC COMMENTS ON ANY OF THE AID PROJECTS. HE SAID THERE WAS A GREAT DEAL HE HAD TO LEARN ABOUT HIS NEW JOB, BUT THAT HE HAD EVERY INTENTION OF MASTERING IT. HE PROMISED TO STUDY THE AID PROJECT SUMMARY WE HAD GIVEN HIM AND WOULD GET BACK TO US. HE STRESSED, HOWEVER, THAT THEY NEEDED ALL THE HELP THEY COULD GET FROM EVERYONE, SPECIFICALLY CITING "MONEY AND EQUIPMENT."

7. REFERRING TO OUR EARLIER CONVERSATION WITH THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING, I ASKED HIM IF HE WAS NOW RESPONSIBLE FOR THE HAVA IN THE HELMAND VALLEY. THE MINISTER DISCUSSED GOVERNMENT PLANS FOR EXPANDING

WATER, POWER, AND IRRIGATED AREAS IN THE HELMAND VALLEY
ALONG THE LINES DISCUSSED BY THE MINISTER OF PLANNING
EARLIER. HE DID NOT, HOWEVER, EXPLICITLY STATE WHETHER
OR NOT HE HAD BEEN GIVEN RESPONSIBILITY FOR HAVA.

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TRSE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03 NSC-05 /092 W
-----117454 081843Z /43

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 KABUL 4651

DEPT PASS AID AND PEACE CORPS; AID FOR NE

8. THE PEACE CORPS DIRECTOR THEN DESCRIBED THE RANGE
OF PAST PEACE CORPS ACTIVITIES IN THE AGRICULTURAL
SECTOR. HE NOTED THAT ALTHOUGH THERE WERE NO CURRENT
PEACE CORPS PROGRAMS WITH THE MINISTRY, HE WAS PREPARED
TO EXPLORE ALL POSSIBLE AREAS OF INTEREST WITH THE
MINISTER OR HIS STAFF. THE MINISTER SAID HE HAD WORKED
WITH PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS IN THE PAST AS A PHYSICIAN
ON THE SMALLPOX ERRADICATION PROJECT, AND THAT HE
HAD BEEN VERY IMPRESSED WITH THEIR COMPETENCE AND
DEDICATION. HOWEVER, HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT HE BELIEVED
THAT THE PRESENCE OF THE VOLUNTEERS TENDED TO CREATE AN
UNDESIRABLE DEPENDENT RELATIONSHIP WITH THE AFGHANS. HE
FURTHER STATED THAT HE FELT THERE WERE SUFFICIENT
AFGHANS TO DO THE KIND OF JOB PERFORMED BY PEACE CORPS
VOLUNTEERS. I INTERJECTED THAT THE MINISTER MAY NEVER-
THELESS, WANT TO CONSIDER AT SOME POINT THE USE OF
PEACE CORPS AS A COMPONENT OF AN AID PROJECT, WHERE
VOLUNTEERS COULD BE PARTICULARLY USEFUL IN COMPLE-
MENTING MORE SKILLED -- AND MUCH MORE COSTLY -- AID
TECHNICIANS. THE MINISTER SAID HE WOULD CONSIDER THIS.

9. AS WE TOOK OUR LEAVE, THE MINISTER SAID HE OR
SOMEONE FROM HIS STAFF WOULD BE IN TOUCH WITH THE
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AID DIRECTOR CONCERNING THE PROJECTS WE HAD DISCUSSED.

10. COMMENT: THE MINISTER WAS FRIENDLY AND PLEASANT, BUT BY HIS OWN ADMISSION WAS NOT KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT HIS MINISTRY -- OR ABOUT OUR AID PROJECTS. WHILE HE PROFESSED TO WANT AND NEED ALL THE FOREIGN ASSISTANCE HE COULD GET FROM ANY SOURCE -- SO LONG AS IT WAS WITHOUT STRINGS -- IT WAS NOT AT ALL CLEAR TO WHAT EXTENT THIS INCLUDED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE. HE STATED HIS OPPOSITION TO PEACE CORPS PROGRAMS QUITE UNAMBIGUOUSLY, LEAVING OPEN ONLY THE SLIGHT HOPE THAT VOLUNTEERS MIGHT BE INCLUDED AS A PART OF FUTURE AID PROGRAMS. END COMMENT.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, MEETING REPORTS, DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS, VOLUNTARY AGENCIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 08 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978KABUL04651
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780240-0105
Format: TEL
From: KABUL
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780682/aaaacsoq.tel
Line Count: 189
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: df30408f-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2441355
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: U.S. ASSISTANCE TO AFGHANISTAN; MEETING WITH THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, DRA. SALEH MOHAMMAD ZERAY
TAGS: EAID, AF, US, PC, (ZERAY, SALEH MOHAMMAD)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/df30408f-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014